

# Child-friendly participatory research tools

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by GRACE MOLINA, FATIMA MOLINA, THOMAS TANNER, and  
FRAN SEBALLOS

## Introduction

Field-based action research on community-based adaptation to climate change needs to engage with all different sections of communities. Children form a significant group that is often overlooked by research and practice at community level, in part because of a lack of appropriate action research tools. In this short piece, we describe some tools for child-friendly participatory research that were used in the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

In general, we found that child-friendly action research is most successful when:

- Cultural norms and the age range of participants shape the research design.
- Research methods are focused on having fun.
- Activities are carried out in small groups, so that individual children feel confident enough to participate.
- Methods are iterative, allowing children themselves to shape and change them.

- Researcher intervention is limited to an explanation of the tool or method.
- A mix of oral, visual, and written activities is used. These help children to express their perceptions, experiences, and ideas concerning hazards, vulnerabilities, and capacities.
- Children also gain from the experience of participating in the research.

## Using child-friendly tools

- Organise the children into small groups. Whenever possible, group by gender and age to highlight differences between male and female, and older and younger children.
- Facilitate icebreakers between sessions to keep the group energetic, develop confidence, and to introduce the tools and methods.

Some useful tools for working with children are shown in Table 1. Whilst many of these will be familiar to practitioners, we

<sup>1</sup> For more details of our work in the Philippines and El Salvador, see Tanner *et al.*, this issue.

**Table 1: Some participatory tools for working with children**

Tool	Application
Mapping	Risks (hazards, vulnerabilities, capacities) Stakeholders Communication pathways
Ranking	Risks, adaptation, and risk management actions
Drawing	Visioning exercises for their future and that of the community Feelings Motivations for participation
Transect walks	Risk identification Action plans
Acting and theatre	Re-enacting impacts of disaster events and responses, as well as for advocating for behavioural and policy change by others
Pyramids	Visual representation of pathway from problem to action
Races	Rapid identification of benefits of different actions
Participatory video	Research into problem, awareness-raising, advocacy process

found that they often had to be adapted to make them more child-friendly. Children were invited to invent and adapt tools and methods.

### Icebreaker – typhoon massage

Icebreakers can range from high energy introductory games linking names and dance moves to topic-related exercises such as the ‘typhoon massage’. The group stands in a circular line. As the leader calls out local geographies and different typhoon stages, the group give and receive ‘typhoon massages’ on each other’s backs. Different areas of the back represent the three areas of the Philippines: Luzon in the north (shoulders), the central Visayas (central back) and Mindanao in the south (lower back). The massage ‘style’ is linked to typhoon development phases: ‘early rain’ (tapping fingers), ‘heavy rain’ (chopping motion), and ‘storm’ (drumming of knuckles).

### Stakeholder analysis and mapping

Standard stakeholder mapping requires participants to first understand the concept of what a stakeholder is. A Venn diagram

approach is then used to represent the power/influence of different ‘stakeholders’ using larger or smaller circles. The location of the circle on a ‘map’ reflects the degree of involvement each stakeholder has with the group. The Venn diagram represents both parameters simultaneously by drawing the appropriately-sized circle at a representative location directly onto the map.

However, in the Camotes Islands, children had difficulties in understanding the linked concepts of ‘stakeholder’, ‘power’ and ‘involvement’. This led to researchers introducing a ‘Me/We map’ and developing a revised step-by-step approach to the mapping (see Figure 1).

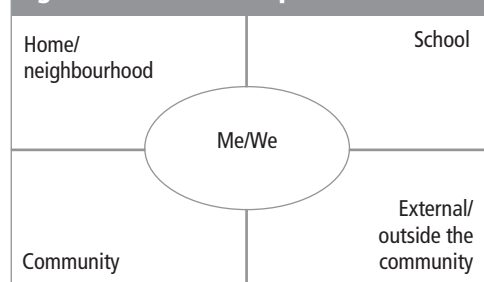
**Figure 1: The ‘Me/We’ map**



Photo: Grace Molina

Regular icebreaker sessions keep the group energetic.

- Divide some paper into four quarters, with a representation of the children's group at the centre. Label each quarter with a space of interaction such as the home, the community, the school, and those beyond the community. Ask the children to record the people they interact with in these spaces, revealing all potential stakeholders.
- Using the map as a guide, children can then represent the influence or power of each stakeholder in relation to the group by recording them on to colour-coded cards.
- Once completed, these cards can then be reallocated in a single line, with the proximity to the individual or group (the Me/We) reflecting the degree of involvement of the stakeholder.

### Risk and activity ranking exercises

Ranking exercises allow children's group participants to identify their priority issues which need to be addressed.

- First, write down each hazard on separate cards, e.g. landslides.
- Then place these on a 3x3 grid that requires the children to consider both the impact of the hazard and the frequency of its occurrence (each divided as high, medium, and low).

- Next, give each child three votes and ask to them vote individually for the hazards they feel pose the greatest risk to them.
- Finally, ask the children to list activities they have undertaken in response to the highlighted hazards.

By generating this grid and list, children are able to consider the full range and impacts of their disaster risk reduction (DRR) and adaptation activities, consider their long-term plans, and discuss new initiatives that might help in dealing with risks. We found the exercise particularly useful in highlighting activities where there were multiple risk reduction and adaptation benefits, for example, mangrove reforestation.

### Benefits races

'Benefits races' allow small groups of children to rapidly develop ideas and generate research results. In the Philippines, a benefits race challenged children in different teams to write down as many perceived advantages of different adaptation and risk reduction options as possible. Feedback suggested this was among the favourites of the children because it was exciting and lively.



Photo: Grace Molina

Hazard and risk ranking exercises in Lower Poblacion, Philippines.

### Identifying messages through visioning

A drawing activity aimed to highlight messages that children convey in order to enable adaptation and risk reduction actions.

- Ask the children to draw their vision of the future for their community and their own lives after they have successfully delivered their DRR activities.
- Then ask them to identify what is different in their picture to the current situation.
- The drawing helps to stimulate creative thinking about what they are trying to achieve, why it is important, and what else needs to happen to help them deliver their future community.
- It enables the children to identify messages they want to raise with stakeholders – from community to national levels – who can provide support towards the realisation of their envisioned community.

Following the drawing process, children in Catig, Lilo-an, Southern Leyte recognised that their coastal clean-up activities were aimed at increasing the fish population and improving livelihood sustainability (message for fisherfolk associations and to obtain local government support) but required everyone in the community to participate in proper waste management and segregation activities (message for family and the village council).

### Building pyramids and validating communication pathways

During the second fieldwork phase, data gathered from earlier visits was used to map communications pathways from risks through to actions, key messages needed to promote change by other stakeholders, through to forms and barriers of communication.



Photo: Fatima Molina

Benefits race exercise, Villahermosa, Philippines.

One method used with child participants to illustrate this flow graphically was an iterative process to develop a pyramid form. The pyramid was a means of representing and verifying key messages related to child-led and child-friendly priority activities in each community. The pyramid briefly showcases:

- the purpose of the endeavour through the identification of the prioritised risk reduction goal (single top level);
- the key causes of the risks: social, economic, or natural (second level);
- the identification of the key impacts of the risk e.g. increased habitat for mosquito breeding or the benefits of achieving their goal e.g. no habitat for mosquitoes to breed (third level); and
- the DRR activities that groups already undertake to achieve their goal (baseline).

Through the visual representation, chil-

dren are given an avenue to further think about information that might be missing. This helps pave the way to determine clearly the communication pathways of children and youth by helping participants to recognise:

- their sources of information and knowledge relating to each cause, impact, or benefit; and
- the target recipients of their messages which will differ according to whether they are communicating cause, impact, benefits of action, or a combination.

The use of these tools helps to foster a two-way learning for the researchers and young people in the field of DRR and adaptation. Its participatory and interactive nature allows each participant to share his or her thoughts and at the same time gain awareness from others' experiences and insights. It also provides space to explore



Photo: Fatima Molina

Drawing for visioning exercises, Catig, Southern Leyte, Philippines.

further opportunities to continuously strengthen and sustain efforts to improve safety, sustainability, and community resilience.

### Ranking enabling and limiting factors

One way to further support children in realising their role as change agents is by identifying and ranking factors that can enable or limit their capacity to act.

- Phased research means common factors can be identified from early phase outputs of multiple (single country) research sites.
- During follow-up phases, children arrange the set of factors from the most significant to the least.
- Children must be given the freedom to remove factors which are not relevant to their context or add those which have not been included.
- This allows children to see which issues they need to address as well as what resources they need to strengthen their ability to undertake development-oriented initiatives, including disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Common factors which limit Filipino children's participation and engagement in development-oriented initiatives included lack of finance, lack of confidence, and a lack of adult understanding of their goals.

These are areas that they now plan to address.

### Other tools for creative expression

The research also facilitated a variety of spaces for children to express their views and ideas. In one exercise, sheets of paper and drawing equipment were provided and participants were asked to draw their motivation for participating in the youth groups and their activities. Presenting these pictures back to the group stimulated discussion as well as highlighting the diversity of motivations for participation. Researchers also joined in, drawing their motivation for undertaking the research.

Similarly, children were invited to create songs or poems about their activities, and act out different disaster impacts and responses (see Tanner *et al.*, this issue). Like participatory video activities (see Plush, this issue), these provided a method both for discussion and learning within the children's groups, but also a tool for advocating change in others. Feedback from these activities suggests that the children gained as much from the process of such creative expression as they do from the finished product itself.

**CONTACT DETAILS**

Fatima Molina and Grace Molina  
 Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP)  
 CSWCD Bldg., R. Magsaysay Avenue  
 University of the Philippines Campus  
 Diliman, Quezon City,  
 Philippines  
 Telephone: +632 9266996  
 Email: [cdp@info.com.ph](mailto:cdp@info.com.ph)  
 Website: [www.cdp.org.ph](http://www.cdp.org.ph)

Thomas Tanner and Fran Seballos  
 Institute of Development Studies (IDS)  
 University of Sussex  
 Brighton  
 BN1 9RE  
 UK  
 Telephone: +44 1273 606261  
 Email: [climatechange@ids.ac.uk](mailto:climatechange@ids.ac.uk)  
 Website: [www.ids.ac.uk/climatechange](http://www.ids.ac.uk/climatechange)

**NOTES**

For further information about work on children, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation, including an annotated bibliography, please visit: [www.childreninachangingclimate.org](http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org)

*Child Oriented Participatory Risk Assessment and Planning (COPRAP): A Toolkit*. Center for Positive Future, Center for Disaster Preparedness, Philippines. Online: <http://proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=43>

*Child-led Disaster Risk Reduction: A practical guide*. Save the Children Alliance. Online: [www.savethechildren.org/publications/emergencies/Child-led-Disaster-Risk-Reduction.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/emergencies/Child-led-Disaster-Risk-Reduction.pdf)

*Children on the Frontline: Children and Young People in Disaster Risk Reduction*. Plan International and World Vision. Online: [www.plan-uk.org/pdfs/childrenonthefrontline.pdf](http://www.plan-uk.org/pdfs/childrenonthefrontline.pdf)

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